

Re-Forming Early Childhood Education as a Field of Practice

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What to Expect

- What's Changing & Changed for ECE
- It's Time for Change – From the Inside Out
- Missing System in ECE Systems Development
- Getting to Shared Understanding of Terms
- Why It Matters

Reforming Childhood Education

As A Field Of Practice

Ground Rules

- Early Childhood Education is a fragmented field of practice –reform efforts have attended primarily to field's fragmented financing, delivery system and policies vs. fragmentation of its **core function**.
- Other than working with children – or on their behalf – few commonalities bind ECE in terms of shared knowledge, preparation, qualifications, commitments, & aspirations.
- Rarely do we/ECE think of individual roles as part of something larger than ourselves, our programs, or our separate sectors.

- **The Consequence:**
 - **Increasing Assortment of Policies & Standards Governing ECE.**
 - **Confusion re: Field's Purpose.**
 - **Uneven Performance.**
 - **Increasing Variety and Range of Funding Streams with Varying Sustainability & Requirements.**
 - **Weakened Internal Leadership Capacity.**

- Arguing For ECE As A Recognized Professional Field of Practice is a **Leadership Manifesto**.
- Moves Beyond Efforts To Repair, Cushion, Or Incrementally Improve What Isn't Working.
- Argues For Deep System Change To Unify ECE As A Field Of Practice.

Attempting To Redirect ECE's Trajectory By

- Becoming accountable as an organized field of practice.
- Assuming responsibility for competent practice of practitioners and children's learning and development results.
- Realizing consistency in practice across settings and program types.
- Developing field-wide leadership & shunning **reliance** on public policy for **defining** the field's purpose and structure.

This Is A Defining Moment For Our Field

What's Changing for ECE?

- Shift From *Programs To Teachers*.
 - Focus on teachers and teaching.
 - Increasing attention to “verified” competencies.
 - Growing expectations for accountability.
- External Forces, Especially Public Policy, Driving Reform[ulation] – and Fragmentation Of ECE.
 - Policy shift from early care and education to early education and care.
 - Increased direction-setting from federal government, states, & communities.
 - Pivot from national to 50 state plus community change strategy.

What's Changed for ECE?

- The Context for Early Educators' Practice.
- External Expectations for Its Work and What It Should Accomplish.
- Widening Gap Between Public Expectations and Field's Capacity to Deliver.

What's Changed for ECE?

- Field's Work and Its Developmental Trajectory Is Being Redefined

In terms of:

- Purpose.
- Who establishes outcomes expected of ECE.
- What the public expects of us.
- What teaching and learning looks like in ECE.
- What it means to be a child in an early learning program.

What's Unchanged?

The Field's Inertia

- **Most Of Us Likely Agree Change Is Need**
- **Where We May Differ is What The Change Should Look Like, The Way to Get There, and Who Should Drive It.**
- **This Time Is Different, Though.**
 - **The change should be from inside out**
 - **And it should reform and re-form ECE as a field of practice.**

It's Time for Change From Inside Out

■ It's Time For ECE To

- Acknowledge its contribution to ECE's present status.
- Recognize practice as ECE's core function.
- Accept responsibility for competence of field's practice.
- Become individually and collectively responsible as a field of practice.
- Develop and exercise field-field leadership to maximize field's competence and contribution to children's learning, development, and school readiness

It's Time for Change From Inside Out

- It's Time For ECE To:
 - Unify around a common purpose
 - Assume responsibility for uniformly competent practitioners to deliver on its promise.
 - Organize as a professional field of practice.

“A vocation is not a profession just because those in it choose to call it one. It must be recognized as such” (John Goodlad, 1990).

It's Time For Change From Inside Out

- *ECE* may not often think beyond individual programs/ sectors, but policy makers and others are thinking about how ECE is organized to do its work.
- Because others are thinking this way – and the field isn't – they are taking the lead in defining and shaping what it means for ECE to be a *field of practice*.

It's Time For Change From Inside Out

- This is a Defining Moment.
 - Too many children are losing ground.
 - Too many children are not accessing their potential.
 - Big gains in knowledge exist BUT we're not applying them.
 - Increased expectations for our performance exist BUT we're not meeting them.
 - ECE is gaining credibility BUT not its practitioners.
 - Others are filling the leadership void and *re-forming* ECE as a field of practice.

**ECE Can And Should Do Better As A Field Of
Practice**

But Not Only Because Others Are Calling For It –

**BUT Because We're Unified Around The Imperative
to Do So –
From The Inside Out**

IT'S TIME

**ECE Should Re-Form It's Structure To Become a
Cohesive System of Preparation, Practice, And
Responsibility**

It's Time to Call the Question

What Defines and Bounds ECE as a Field of Practice?

**Staying the Course
Is
Like Navigating a New World with an Old Map**

(BNY Mellon Wealth Management Advertisement)

The Missing System In ECE Systems Development

ECE's Fractures as a Field of Practice Need To Be Eliminated.

Current Approaches Too Often Further Fracture The Field

- Voluntary strategies adding to variations and unevenness in practice.
- Layered interventions creating still further fragmentation — intensifying capacity issue, and deflecting focus and resources from practitioner and program effectiveness.
- Disconnected reform strategies causing ECE to become increasingly and unnecessarily complex and burdensome to navigate and alter.

The Missing System in ECE Systems Development

– ECE as an Organized / *aka Professional* / Field of Practice.

– “Organized”

- Having a formal organization or structure, esp. to coordinate or carry out widespread activities: e.g., organized medicine; organized crime.
- Each of these occupations is an organized as field of practice – even though only one is a recognized profession!

The Missing System In ECE Systems Development

- ECE Not Organized Around Shared Intentions, Best Practices, And Outcomes.
- For Example:
 - What is the name for this field of practice?
 - What does one need to know and be able to do to be recognized as an early childhood educator?
 - What is our unique contribution as a field of practice?
 - What outcomes are we responsible for as a field of practice – individually and collectively?

The Missing System in ECE Systems Development

- Missing System = ECE As Professional Field Of Practice.
- Achieving Collective Intentionality Depends On ECE Stepping Up To Its Obligations – To Taking Steps That Unify ECE As A Professional Field Of Practice.
 - Requires assuming responsibility for overall field and its results.
 - Requires willingness to recognize and adapt to new realities.
 - Requires **field-wide will** to transform ECE as a field of practice.

Getting To Shared Understanding Of Terms

Typical Meanings of “Professional”

- Paid vs. amateur
- Respectful
- Tasks completed with skill and competence
- Reliable, competent service provided
- Knowledgeable execution
- Conscientious
- “Just plain good”

Getting to Shared Understanding of Terms

- The adjective “professional” is confused with “profession” as a noun.
- Professions are systems of preparation, practice, and accountability.
- They are intentionally structured differently from occupations.

Occupation

- **Market- or employer-driven**
- **Service for hire – consumers/employers can hire anyone they want**
- **“And other duties as assigned”**
- **Individually (vs. collectively) oriented**
- **Sometimes externally regulated or monitored**
- **Certificates, degrees, apprenticeship associated with increased occupational skill and market viability**

Profession

- **A systemic, field-unifying structure organizational structure**
- **Occupationally controlled preparation, certification, & practice expectations**
- **Evidence based practices**
- **Credentials required for entry & career mobility**
- **Defined boundaries & scope of practice**
- **Licensure required for practice**
- **Unique knowledge & skills serve a “noble” purpose/ Ability to exercise of clinical judgment**
- **Field-wide leadership present**

Why the Distinction Matters

- Distinctions between occupations and professions goes beyond degrees - and even effective application of knowledge and skills.
- Organizing as a Professional Field of Practice Answers Questions Of:
 - Purpose.
 - Responsibility – For what the profession holds itself accountable
 - Uniform Preparation Standards.
 - Scopes of Practice.
 - Governance

“You’ve got to be very careful if you don’t know where you’re going because you might not get there.”

Yogi Berra

Why It Matters

■ ECE's Future Will Vary Depending

On Whether:

- It becomes unified as a field of practice (or remains a mix of disconnected programs and services).
- It assumes responsibility for practitioner competence (or retains this as an individual option).
- It structures itself so the field's knowledge base can be uniformly applied (or relies on a handful of strong programs to demonstrate quality).
- The field seizes opportunity to reorganize itself and define its future (or remains passive as field of practice).

Why It Matters

- By Not Answering Field-Defining Questions, ECE:
 - Allowing children to spend their days in programs of uneven quality and effectiveness.
 - Making it harder to create a coordinated system.
 - Denying itself chance to become recognized for specialized expertise.
 - Expanding leadership void for others to fill.
- ECE's Integrity Is On the Line.

ECE doesn't own all of the challenges associated with the field or its present status as a field or practice.

BUT

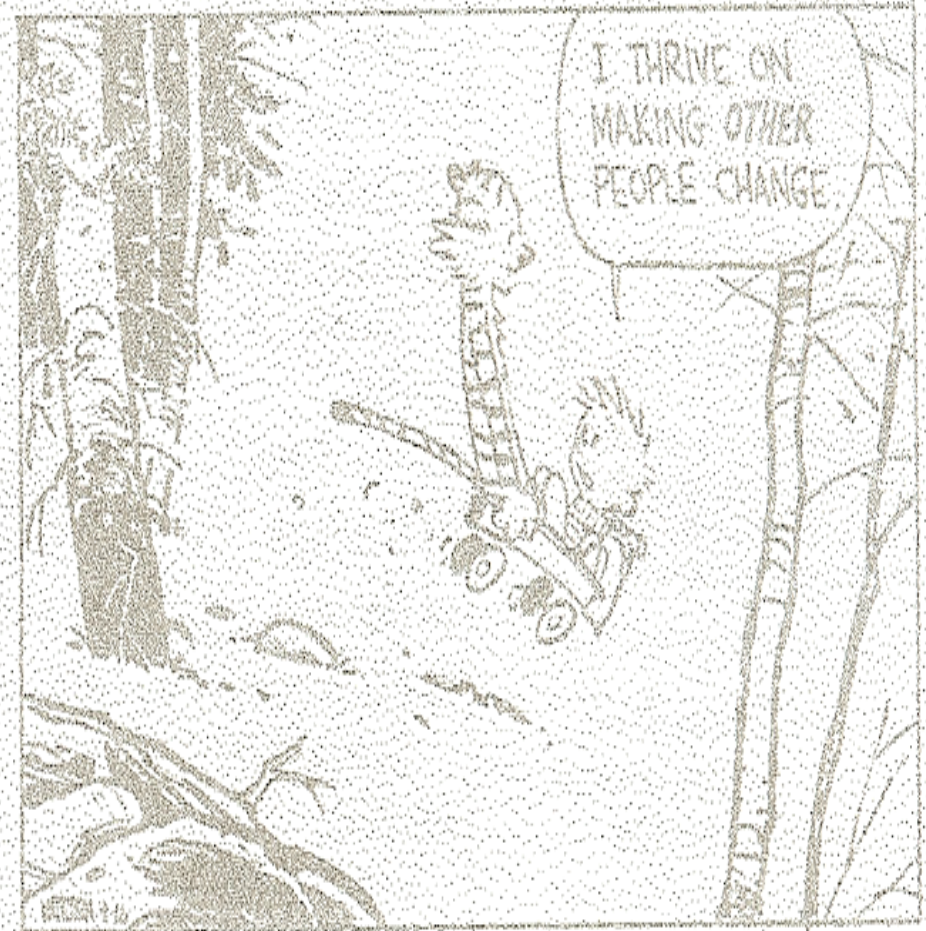
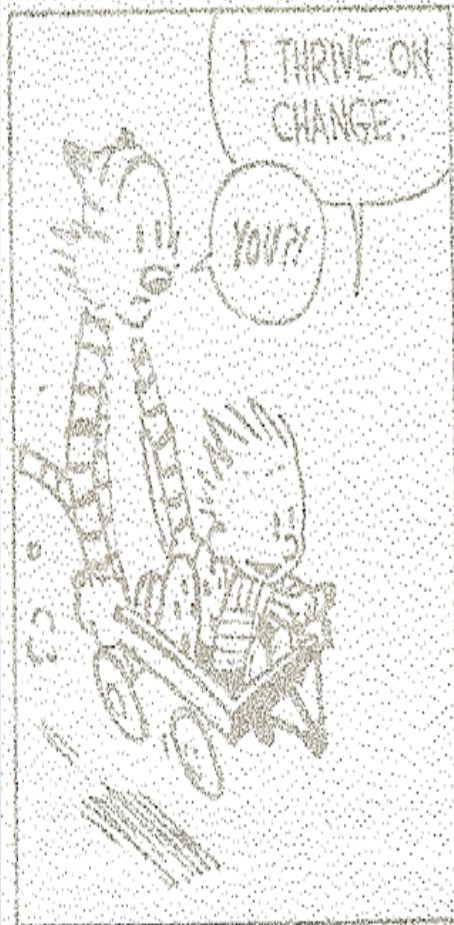
Passivity and accommodating the status quo has led to widening gap between rhetoric and behavior – between promises and performance.

Calvin: I thrive on change. Hobbes: You?!

Hobbes: You threw a fit because your mom put less jelly on your toast than yesterday!

Calvin: I thrive on making other people change. [from Washington Post, 2010]

CALVIN AND HOBBS



**It's Time For Change
This Time From Inside Out**

**Needed:
Willingness to Step Forward
For ECE's Future**

It's Up To Us –Individually and Collectively–

**To Step Forward and Assume
Responsibility As A Field Of Practice**

**To Become Accountable for Preparing Competent Practitioners
Who Can Deliver On the Field's Promise.**

It's Our Turn To Be Change Agents For ECE

- If ECE Choses To Organize As A Profession, Change Would Be **Transformative** – Even If Change Process Incremental.
- Professionalizing ECE As Field Of Practice
 - Would inject decisive break with field's usual ways of “doing.”
 - Would elevate teaching young children as a distinctive professional practice and define its work as a profession.

This Is Not A Typical Moment In Time.

WHETHER TO CHANGE IS NOT AN OPTION.

ECE WILL CONTINUE TO CHANGE.

What Is The Future We Want To Create For ECE?

WE CAN STEP FORWARD

&

SHAPE WHAT CHANGE LOOKS LIKE

OR

PREPARE OURSELVES TO BE FURTHER CHANGED.

**“Dreams Contain The Power To Transform
Mediocrity Into Magnificence”** [Dawn Stankowski]

- **Left for ECE To Decide**

Whose Dreams Will Drive The Field's Future?

Thank you for giving me this opportunity.

Questions?

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